This article discusses one student's persistence in misunderstanding her teacher's written comments on her papers, even when these comments are accompanied by other response channels that serve, in part, to clarify the written comments. It presents the idea that student and teacher each bring to the written response episode a set of information, skills, and values that may or may not be shared between them, and it is the interplay of these three elements that feeds the student's reading and processing of teacher written comments and that leads to misunderstandings. This happened even for a high-achieving student in an otherwise successful classroom. An in-depth look at one student and the classroom context in which she learns to write, focusing on her grappling with her teacher's written comments, reveals the complexity of the teaching-learning process in the high school writing class.

A Good Girl Writes Like a Good Girl

Written Response to Student Writing

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In the writing classroom, as in any classroom, there are many opportunities for misunderstanding between teachers and students. The misunderstandings are particularly evident when teachers react to student work through written responses on student papers. If teachers march to vintage drummers, they call this activity "cor-

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recting," although the student is often not "corrected" as the teacher expects. If the beat is newer, they are providing "feedback," although the feedback often falls short of its target.

The past ten to twenty years has seen a good deal of research on teacher written responses to student writing, fostered, in part, because written response has enjoyed the sanction of traditional pedagogy (e.g., CEEB, 1963) and has continued to be the dominant mode of response to student writing (Searle & Dillon, 1980). With increasing focus on the cognitive and linguistic processes of writing and composing, research has suggested improved written response practices, entailing the integration of written response into a protracted writing process where it has been shown to have merit: see, for example, Beach's (1979) study on the effectiveness of focused between-draft response on revision, Hillocks's (1982) look at the efficacy of written response that echoes other classroom activity, or Freedman's (1985; in press) studies of the integrated in-process response practices of successful teachers. Suggested improvements also reflect considerations such as Lees's (1979) for whether particular teacher comments place the burden of rewriting decisions—again, the assumption is made of a process orientation—on the student or on the teacher; Butler's (1980) concern that the "squiggles" that carry meaning for the teacher often carry none for the student; Sommers's (1982, p. 152) outcry over facile comments that can be "interchanged, rubber-stamped, from text to text"; or Hahn's (1981) discovery that students find comments to reflect their teachers' confused readings rather than their own confused writings and so discount the value of these comments. Through such studies we have gained valuable knowledge about the nature and effects of written response to student writing, enlightenment that would tend to lead to more considered use of this response mode, at least among better teachers, and toward its integration with other modes such as teacher-student conferences.

THE PERSISTENCE OF STUDENT MISUNDERSTANDINGS

With all this, however, we have yet to uncover what often seems an uncanny *persistence* in students to misunderstand the written response they receive on their papers: Written comments are often misconstrued even when they are addressed to the most promising

students in otherwise successful classrooms; they are misconstrued even when they are accompanied by teacher-student conferences, by peer response groups, as well as by whole class discussion focused on response. In other words, teacher written response is misunderstood even in classrooms that strongly reflect what we consider the best of current thought on the teaching of writing (Sperling, 1985). It would seem that, were we to uncover some of the elements not only of these misunderstandings but of the frequent understandings of teacher written response as well, finding their roots, as well as our perspective, in a larger learning context, we should have an opportunity to learn more about the forces that underlie the teaching and learning of writing. In this article we look in depth at one promising student's processing of teacher written comments in a response-rich classroom, considering the larger learning contexts that impinge on the student's interpretations.

PERSPECTIVES

We choose a case study to supplement past studies of teacher written response, which often tend to regard a given comment as a static product, disembodied from the cognitive or social forces operating within or between teacher and student. Yet these forces are key in the teaching-learning context. And context is a major consideration when we talk about what students do and do not understand. Work in learning and development by Vygotsky (1978) and others implies the aptness of looking at written responses and students' reactions to them as functions of the greater social and cognitive dynamic of the classroom.

According to Vygotsky, students learn and develop when *information, skills,* and *values* are negotiated socially. The cognitive consequences of social interaction are that what begins as social process—such as shared problem solving—is internalized and becomes part of the student's independent cognitive equipment. Vygotsky refers to this process as the internalization of socially rooted activities. Vygotsky's theories regarding this social dynamic of learning implicate as crucial to the student's assimilation of such adult problem-solving strategies the emerging *match* between teacher's and student's information, skills, and values.

The case study that we present here allows us to look at the information, skills, and values that teacher and student possess. While it would be an impossible task to unearth all conceivable information, skills, and values that an individual brings to any given task, our earlier work (Freedman, 1985; Greenleaf, 1985; Sperling, 1985) strongly suggests that these three factors are at least in part reflected in the teacher's and student's *definitions of the response situation*—that is, in their expressed sense of its purpose as well as in their apparent solutions to the writing problems addressed by the responses. These definitions, of course, cannot be "read into" the responses written on a student's papers or even into a student's revisions based on the responses. They must be garnered from the context in which the response is embedded, that is, from classroom talk and other activities surrounding teaching and learning and from the student's and teacher's perceptions of the activities. The teacher's definition, for example, emerges in part when the teacher tells his or her class, "I want you to look over what I've written on your paper, and I want to talk [to you] mainly about what you do not understand," implying that oral response is meant to supplement and thereby clarify the cognitive confusion that written response can create. The student's definition emerges in part in the research interview, such as when our case study student asserts that the teacher's oral response is solely an aid to deciphering his handwriting, an unnecessary event when a student is good at reading the handwriting of others, as she believes herself to be. Seen from the perspective of such contextual information, the interaction resulting from written response begins to reveal some of the complexity of the whole teaching-learning dynamic in the writing classroom.

In order to examine both the understanding and the misunderstanding surrounding written response on student writing, even among promising students in otherwise successful classrooms, we will present the case of Lisa, in Mr. Peterson's classroom, with an eye toward examining the information, skills, and values embedded in the learning context. Using one case-study student and teacher serves our purposes well, as we do not intend to generalize the idiosyncrasies of one or even several students or teachers to the greater population of students and teachers, but rather to focus in depth on an experience that theoretically should show something close to a "best case" view of written response. Any failings in communication in such a context should alert us to serious teaching and learning constraints. On the

other hand, successes could point to where written response can be useful. The written response interactions in this case unfolded as part of a larger ethnographic study on the role of response in the acquisition of written language (Freedman, 1985, in press).[1]

MR. PETERSON, THE TEACHER[2]

During the seven weeks that we observed his ninth-grade English class, one overarching goal seemed to drive all of Mr. Peterson's teaching: He aimed to teach his students to think critically and creatively, both about their world and about the literature they read. Freedman (in press) offers a full account of how Mr. Peterson achieves his goals. Briefly, he used writing as one key way. He designed activities to help the students sharpen their powers of observation, to notice detail both in their everyday lives and in their reading, and he worked with them to develop sound judgments based on the detail they observed. He also pushed his students to look for the unusual, the interesting, the unexpected, the apparent contradictions—to think in novel and unique ways. Mr. Peterson introduced students to techniques for sharpening their thoughts as they worked to communicate them in writing. He stressed techniques to capture the reader's interest and imagination, to stretch the reader's experience, and to communicate sophisticated ideas—for example, using vivid and specific verbs, cutting out excess verbiage, practicing syntactic structures that allow contrast to be shown, and modulating the general and the specific.

Mr. Peterson's philosophy unified his curriculum; every one of his instructions, suggestions, assignments, and exercises served in the orchestration of student activity so that seemingly separate pieces of advice attached to discrete activities became part of a coherent blueprint for his students' growth as learners and as writers.

LISA, THE STUDENT

Before the semester with Mr. Peterson began, our focal student, Lisa, had been identified to be high achieving: Her scores on a standardized test of basic skills ranked in the ninetieth percentile

range; her grades the previous semester were all A's. As a student in Mr. Peterson's class, Lisa did all her assignments on time, sometimes even ahead of schedule, getting top grades on all her work. She interacted actively in groups and in the whole class, contributing much to classroom discussion and to peer group work. In her peer group, for example, Lisa was often the spokesperson, reading to the rest of the class her own or her peers' writing or volunteering answers to Mr. Peterson's questions. It was common for Mr. Peterson to assign individual writing tasks to be completed in small groups—each student in the group, say, creating sentences with particular characteristics such as vivid verbs or detail that he or she would share with group members, the group then choosing the best piece to read to the rest of the class. In Lisa's group, hers was often the piece read, and Lisa had no reservations about volunteering her own pieces when she felt they were the best from her group. When she read, she did so with a loud, clear voice, a voice that could be heard above others in her group when, on occasion, everyone in the group happened to be talking at the same time (see Freedman & Bennett, 1987, for more information about groups in Mr. Peterson's class). Also, it was often Lisa who reminded her classmates, or Mr. Peterson, of writing due dates or of reading assignments. Her behavior resulted in high visibility in class as a "good" student.

THE WRITING ASSIGNMENT[3]

Mr. Peterson's students were to write a character study of a friend or acquaintance. To this end they first did practice writings and other prewriting activities related to the topic; then they wrote a series of drafts. During the writing process they participated in teacher-student conferences and peer response groups, and, in addition, Mr. Peterson responded to all writing with written comments. The character study assignment produced three major drafts of writing: (a) a rough draft of a short anecdote about the friend or acquaintance; (b) a final draft of the anecdote; and (c) a final draft of the fuller character sketch of the person, of which the anecdote served as part. From beginning prewriting to final draft due date, this writing assignment spanned five weeks. Lisa wrote about Sister Carolyn-Marie, her eighth grade teacher.

THE WRITTEN COMMENTS: RESPONSE ROUNDS

Mr. Peterson wrote comments on each draft of Lisa's character study. We have, as a result, many couplings of text and teacher comment with which Lisa interacts, either "understanding" or "misunderstanding"—couplings, that is, to which both Mr. Peterson and Lisa bring their own (shared or unshared) information, skills, and values. Text, comment, and reaction make up a unit, a kind of *round* of interaction, or *response round,* analogous to the oral turn-taking designation made by Garvey (1977). Following Garvey, a response round consists of a segment of student text, the teacher's written response, the student's reaction to that response, and, sometimes, the student's subsequent redrafting of the text. We begin our look at Lisa's interactions with Mr. Peterson's written comments by closely considering these response rounds.

Discovering Shared Information Between Teacher and Student

When we look at Lisa's understandings and misunderstandings, we do not have knowledge about all of the information, skills, and values shared by her and Mr. Peterson. Sometimes, for example, Mr. Peterson's comments seem to assume of Lisa past knowledge not made explicit in his classroom. In the ninth grade, for instance, many teachers might tacitly assume that students understand such concepts as "run-together sentence" or "sentence fragment"; have the skills to identify and solve these writing problems; and believe that run-together sentences or sentence fragments, in many contexts, denote "poor" writing because they betray ignorance of sentence boundaries, something readers in these contexts, do not expect to encounter. We could not "observe" such unexpressed assumptions. Thus we can look only at what is *explicit* in the data and draw conclusions based on that.

For the larger ethnography, we generated a semantic network based on the teacher's and students' talk (Greenleaf, 1985; this compilation can be found in the Appendix). The network identified all the *information* about writing and the writing process that both teachers and students had explicitly expressed (for example, informa-

tion on consistency of verb tense, or on descriptive detail, or even on "good writing") and suggested at least some of the explicitly stated beliefs held by both teachers and students regarding writing. These beliefs were referred to in the semantic analysis as the teacher's and students' notions of "ideal text" and "ideal writing process" (for a complete explanation of this analysis, see Greenleaf, 1985). Using the compilation of the semantic network analysis as a data check, we categorized Mr. Peterson's written comments on each draft of Lisa's writing according to whether or not he had been explicit in his classroom talk about the kind of problem or issues the comment referred to. That is, each comment does or does not have a referent in the classroom teaching. Accordingly, each comment is labeled either [+CLASSROOM REFERENCE] or [–CLASSROOM REFERENCE]. For example, on her final draft Lisa writes:

> C1, L1: SHE POSSESSED A DOMINATING PERSONALITY THAT COULD EASILY SHATTER ANY STERIOTYPE OF NUNS THAT HOLLYWOOD, WITH THE AID OF ITS SILVER SCREENS, MOLDED INTO OUR MINDS.

To this, Mr. Peterson suggests moving *HOLLYWOOD* to precede *STERIOTYPE* (he does not correct the spelling of "stereotype") and omitting the last prepositional phrase. The text with the teacher's comments resembles the following:

C1, P1: SHE POSSESSED A DOMINATING PERSONALITY THAT COULD EASILY SHATTER ANY STERIOTYPE OF NUNS THAT HOLLYWOOD, WITH THE AID OF ITS SILVER SCREENS, MOLDED INTO OUR MINDS. You don't need this

We marked this change as having a referent in Mr. Peterson's talk (or [+CLASSROOM REFERENCE]), as the semantic analysis uncovered the fact that Mr. Peterson had often remarked in class that students should watch for "getting rid of excess words," the written comment reflecting, then, his ideal text, one with no excess words, and his ideal writing process, one that incorporates skills to edit out excesses.

On the other hand, some comments reflect no in-class referent observable to us. For example, also on her final draft, Lisa writes:

C2, L1: AGAIN SHE GAVE THE WHOLE CLASS A TEST, YET AGAIN SOME FAILED. THIS CAUSED HER SOME CONCERN, UNFORTUNATELY FOR OUR CLASS, CONCERN MADE SR. CAROLYN EDGY AND POSITIVELY MEAN.

To this, Mr. Peterson points out a run-together sentence:

C2, P1: . . . THIS CAUSED HER SOME CONCERN// UNFORTUNATELY FOR OUR CLASS, CONCERN MADE SR. CAROLYN EDGY . . .

new sentence

We marked this comment as having no classroom referent (or [—CLASSROOM REFERENCE]), as Mr. Peterson had not, according to the semantic analysis, referred in class to the grammatical problem of run-together sentences, there being no explicit indication, then, that run-together sentences violated some notion of ideal texts. While he may have been assuming past knowledge on Lisa's part, we could not mark a tacit assumption as a referent.

The reason for characterizing teacher written comments for having or not having a referent was simply to circumscribe, *based on what was observable*, the *information* that operated on the response rounds.

Discovering Demonstrated Student Skill

Even where the semantic network indicated that Mr. Peterson and Lisa shared information pertinent to Lisa's writing the various drafts of her character sketch assignment, Lisa could nonetheless fall short of demonstrating the skill to act on that information. We thus noted whether or not the parts of Lisa's text that Mr. Peterson commented on reflected a skillful execution of his notion of ideal text; these are labeled accordingly [+/–IDEAL TEXT].

For example, on the final character sketch, Lisa writes:

C3, L1: MY EIGHTH GRADE TEACHER, SISTER CAROLYN-MARIE, HAD GREEN EYES AND SHORT, CURLY BROWN HAIR WHICH SHE LOVED TO RUN HER FINGERS THROUGH.

To this Mr. Peterson comments:

C3, P1: GOOD.

For this passage, we noted that Lisa demonstrated skillful execution of writing that Mr. Peterson valued; that is, the passage was [+IDEAL

TEXT]. Of course, it is impossible to know from the generalized comments of "good" exactly what features of his ideal text Mr. Peterson was referring to; however, it is possible, based on information from the classroom context, to venture a possible explanation. Because the assignment asked for a character description, and because class discussion at this point in the semester focused a great deal on generating specific descriptive detail in order to give a reader a vivid picture of one's subject, it appears that Mr. Peterson's comment referred to Lisa's producing "specific and concrete" prose that "uses descriptions"—his expressed ideal text.

On the other hand, some passages that Mr. Peterson marked did not reflect execution of ideal text; these passages were thus [–IDEAL TEXT]. So, for example, we noted that C1, P1, cited earlier for its observed in-class reference to getting rid of excess words, also reflected a lack of student accomplishment as Lisa did not execute this "ideal." The reason for characterizing Lisa's marked passages for demonstrating or failing to demonstrate writing skill, was simply to designate, *based on her written products,* the *skills* that operated on the response rounds.

THE MATCH BETWEEN TEACHER AND STUDENT UNDERSTANDINGS[4]

There were seven written response rounds for the rough draft of the anecdote. Only one (14%) entailed a teacher written comment referring to information that had not surfaced in the classroom during our seven-week observation; that is, the comment was [–CLASSROOM REFERENCE] and depended on information potentially unshared by teacher and student. There were 15 written response rounds for the final draft of the anecdote. Only 3 (20%) were [–CLASSROOM REFERENCE]. There were 26 written response rounds in the final character sketch. Only 7 (27%) were [–CLASSROOM REFERENCE].

Most comments, then, referred to information that had surfaced in class during our seven-week observation, and thus to Mr. Peterson's expressed notions of ideal text or ideal writing process, notions, that is, that the students had been exposed to in class. Still, between 14% and 27% of his comments, depending on the piece of writing in

question, did not refer to information that had surfaced in class, and we saw these as potentially knotty points where misunderstanding might be considerable. That is, these were places where Mr. Peterson relied on Lisa's sharing his information but where the information appeared not readily available to be shared, implying that Lisa had to process these comments potentially without sufficient information to "get it right."

In fact we have evidence that such ungrounded comments did pose unusual knots for Lisa, which she was not fully able to untie. And notably, our analysis showed that in *all* of Lisa's drafts where Mr. Peterson had written comments that we found to be without observable in-class referent (that is, for 100% of what we found to be [–CLASSROOM REFERENCE] comments), her revisions had in some way failed to demonstrate Mr. Peterson's ideal text. In other words, her composing process had somehow gone amiss, and these [–CLASSROOM REFERENCE] comments were potentially of little help to her as they had no anchor in his classroom.

Lisa, however, is an able student and makes telling attempts to unravel her unnamed writing problems. Let us look at Lisa's attempts to rewrite text on which Mr. Peterson had made one such [–CLASSROOM REFERENCE]) comment. On the rough draft of the anecdote she writes:

> A1, L1: ONE MINUTE SHE CAN HAVE A GRIN STRETCHING FROM EAR TO EAR AND THEN THE VERY NEXT MINUTE . . .

Mr. Peterson underlines *STRETCHING FROM EAR TO EAR* and draws a line connecting her text to his marginal comment, which asks for "another way to say this," The text with his comments looks like this:

> A1, P1: ONE MINUTE SHE CAN HAVE A GRIN STRETCHING FROM EAR TO EAR AND THEN THE VERY NEXT MINUTE . . . another way to say this?

We have no explicit evidence from class discussions or from conferences with Lisa of any particular problem that Mr. Peterson may have had in mind when he wrote his comment; we observed no expressed "ideal text" that he might have been referring to—that is, he never discussed cliches and how to avoid them. However, from our own background knowledge as well as from what ensued in the following

draft, we might well assume that he wanted Lisa to eliminate the cliche, (grin) *STRETCHING FROM EAR TO EAR*. In this regard, two things are of note. First, as we indicated above, our semantic network revealed no lessons or discussion about cliches. Second, a close look at his written comment reveals that the line connecting his comment with Lisa's text points only at one word, *STRETCHING*. It is important to keep both these observations in mind when considering Lisa's rewrite of this line in the final draft of the anecdote:

> B1, L1: ONE MINUTE SHE CAN BE GRINNING FROM EAR TO EAR, THEN THE VERY NEXT MINUTE . . .

Lisa had eliminated the word *STRETCHING*, which Mr. Peterson's line had pointed at in the rough draft of the anecdote. However, this elimination has not solved the problem that Mr. Peterson was apparently referring to. For on the final draft of the anecdote Mr. Peterson responds by penning out *FROM EAR TO EAR*, still, presumably, attacking the problem of the cliche, a problem, it begins to appear, to which Lisa brings no ready background of her own and, as we know, no background from the context of Mr. Peterson's class. Lisa's revised text with Mr. Peterson's comment looks like this:

B1, P1: ONE MINUTE SHE CAN BE GRINNING FROM EAR TO EAR,
THEN THE VERY NEXT MINUTE . . .

On the next revision, the final character sketch, Lisa eliminates the cliche:

> C1, L1: ONE MINUTE SHE COULD BE GRINNING, THEN THE VERY NEXT MINUTE . . .

However, while on the surface Lisa gets rid of the problem, we have no evidence that she shares Mr. Peterson's information about cliches. We emphasize, though, that she shows herself to be a skillful follower of directions.

In contrast, there were many more response rounds for which Mr. Peterson's comments were [+CLASSROOM REFERENCE] rather than [–CLASSROOM REFERENCE]. These comments referred both to places where Lisa failed to execute a text in congruence with

Mr. Peterson's ideal text and to places where Lisa's text was successful. In the rough draft of the anecdote, of the 6 [+CLASSROOM REFERENCE] written response rounds, 3 (50%) of Lisa's passages failed to execute ideal text (that is, they were [–IDEAL TEXT]); in the final draft of the anecdote, of the 12 [+CLASSROOM REFERENCE] written responses rounds, 5 (42%) of Lisa's passages failed to execute ideal text; in the final character sketch, of the 19 [+CLASSROOM REFERENCE] written response rounds, 10 (53%) of Lisa's passages failed to execute ideal text. In other words, about half the time Mr. Peterson's comments referred to Lisa's [–IDEAL TEXT]. But the other half of the time they referred to her [+IDEAL TEXT].

Lisa, not surprisingly, appears to have no trouble processing comments referring to [+IDEAL TEXT]. We have evidence that she readily interprets an abstract "good" or a star drawn next to her text, and in subsequent drafts simply produces more of the same kind of successful prose. In the rough draft of the anecdote, for example, Lisa uses the verb *PERFORMED,* a "fancy" verb that elicits a star from Mr. Peterson. In the final draft of the anecdote she gives him *SNARL* and *SCREECHED,* which also get his stars. In the final character sketch she adds *NASTY SNARL, POUNCED,* and *SNAP.* These, too, are starred by Mr. Peterson. One sentence receives two stars:

> C4, L1: EVENTUALLY EVERY [ONE] SQUEEKED BY, BUT THE PRICE SR. CAROLYN HAD TO PAY FOR A CLASS WHO UNDERSTOOD PUNCTUATION INSIDE AND OUT WAS A CLASS WHO WAS ALSO SICK AND TIRED OF PUNCTUATION.

In an interview, Lisa tells us that she was conscious of choosing *SQUEEKED,* and conscious that Mr. Peterson would like the word. Lisa also tells us that Mr. Peterson likes "phrases." When we probe her on this, she says, "Well . . . it's like idioms, or similes. Stuff like that. He likes those things. Or special words. You know. Big words. Whenever I write, I always have the thesaurus around. You know. For interesting words. I learned that in the eighth grade. I remember, our teacher said, when you get to high school, always use a thesaurus. So I just have. And it's helped." From our observations in class, we know, too, that students were given a great deal of group and class feedback on their use of vivid, "interesting" language, and were rewarded for it in various ways, such as in group games. The point here is that Lisa has developed the skills and strategies (using the thesaurus, for

example) for producing vivid language, along with acquiring both in eighth grade and extensively in Mr. Peterson's class the information that vivid language is useful and important in writing. What it seems to take, at least in part, for Lisa to process readily Mr. Peterson's written comments, then, is redundancy across response modes that fosters her matching both his information and skills. However, a close look at other response rounds alerts us to what lies beyond matching the teacher's information and skills in Lisa's interactions with Mr. Peterson's written comments.

A QUESTION OF VALUES

We must remember that in this classroom rich in response, Lisa may draw on resources outside herself for processing written comments. That is, she may draw on her conference with Mr. Peterson, on her peers, or on other resources outside the classroom setting. In fact, Lisa does have conferences with Mr. Peterson more than once over drafts of this character study, clarifying information and discussing plans for revision. Yet in spite of her conferences with the teacher and in spite of opportunities to share her drafts with fellow students, Lisa persists in misunderstanding many of Mr. Peterson's written comments, which continue to provide stumbling blocks and confusion for her, as we shall see. We feel that more is at work here than a mismatch of teacher and student information and skill. Thus we probe for other forces that might influence her internal wrestling with these trouble spots, wrestling that could potentially result in shaping her cognitive model of successful writing process and successful written text. We find the following.

Lisa's Values: The Teacher Knows Best, so Do Whatever He Tells You

Interviews with Lisa reveal a closely held assumption that appears to drive much of her writing and that she brings to these written, and other oral, response rounds, specifically, that Mr. Peterson's comments reflect his wiser perspective on writing, and for this reason a student would do well to accept them—"always." In one interview, for example, when we comb through Mr. Peterson's written comments

on her writing and focus on some text changes that he had made on her draft, she says that some students mind it when Mr. Peterson "changes their wording," but she doesn't because "Mr. Peterson has more experience and he probably knows what he's doing." She tells us that once, when her group wrote a collaborative piece, Mr. Peterson changed the wording and another student got "really upset." Says Lisa, "She was making too much fuss over it. Mr. Peterson came around and said, 'I wouldn't steer you wrong. I think this honestly sounds better.' " Lisa indicates that she approved of his stance. Lisa's recollection of the incident in class as well as her expressed feelings about Mr. Peterson's editing of her drafts, indicate the value she places not only on the teacher's point of view, but also on his right to impose it on hers.

Unlike many researchers, teachers, and fellow students, Lisa is ready and willing to approve of her text's being "appropriated" by the teacher. As she tells us, she has learned to write "under his [Mr. Peterson's] specifications, and stuff like that. Sometimes he wants you to put this first, and that last. You know. So you do that. Even if you don't think it's that effective. . . . Because when I write my own book, I can do it the other way. But I'm not writing my own book. So I'm writing for him actually."

Closely tied to the notion, then, of doing what the teacher tells you to do is another value: *You write to make the teacher happy.* In fact, we recall Lisa making quite public the value she puts on pleasing the teacher when, during one class discussion as Mr. Peterson searched for a successful rewrite to a paragraph that he was modeling, she raised her hand, waved it his way, and said,"Mr. Peterson, Mr. Peterson, can I read it [her rewrite]? I did it the way you wanted me to." Another assumption, then, that appears to drive Lisa's writing and that she brings to the written response rounds, is that one writes in ways that reveal how compliant one is to the demands/desires of the teacher-authority. Put succinctly, a good girl writes like a good girl. An interview that we had with Lisa at the close of the assignment sequence reveals her valuing of compliant behavior. She tells us that her writing has changed over the course of the semester because she has learned to "write for other people." When we ask her to explain what she means by that, she says, "They're going to grade it. They're going to read it. You know. You're doing it because they want you to. So it's for other people." This compliance carries her across teachers and semesters: "Every time I have a teacher, there's different things

about what he wants you to do and what he doesn't want you to do. And you have to pick up new things each semester. Once you find out what they like, you just give them that specific detail. You know." As we saw earlier, Lisa knows that Mr. Peterson likes "little phrases and synonyms," so, she says, "I give him a lot of that in my paper. . . . He likes those things. He puts a lot of stars there" (referring to his written comments). The question is whether Mr. Peterson's value of vivid language is in fact in congruence with Lisa's for "giving him what he wants."

These values, though, give us a way to look at Lisa's interpretations of Mr. Peterson's written comments. And a comment such as "good writing," for Lisa, takes on meaning colored by these values, meaning that transcends giving a reader an aesthetically satisfying experience.

Mr. Peterson's Values: A Student's Ideal Is to Develop a Personal Voice

In an interview, Mr. Peterson tells us that he does not believe that simple compliance to his "wants" equals writing well. "Writing well," he says, "has to do with developing a personal voice." He says that ideally what the teacher "wants" is what any general reading audience wants—a well-developed writing style. This assumption is supported by the data on ideal text and ideal writing process that emerged from the semantic network analysis. In our interview, Mr. Peterson acknowledges that an attitude about pleasing the teacher is widespread among students—"It's part of going to school." Yet he feels that in order to learn really to write, students "have to work out some compromises to accomplish what's important to them." According to Mr. Peterson, when students learn to write, concerted attempts to be compliant with him may be at odds with what in fact will help them to develop as writers. Mere direction-following does not equal "interacting" with the teacher's information, skills, and values. This consideration alerts us to another, related value: *A student's ideal is to develop a personal sense of judgment about writing.*

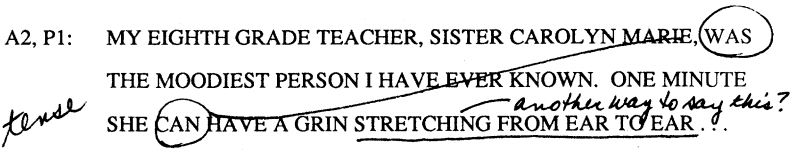
In practice, then, whether or not Lisa's information and skills match the teacher's, Lisa brings values to the problem solving that Mr. Peterson does not share and that may feed Lisa's persistence in

misprocessing some of his responses. Ironically, but not at all incidentally, the value Mr. Peterson places on students sometimes compromising his suggestions in favor of their own reasoned choices is never expressed in the classroom (that is, it is [–CLASSROOM REFERENCE]). We will illustrate this point with two response rounds that were seen as potentially vulnerable to Lisa's misinterpretation.

[+CLASSROOM REFERENCE] [–IDEAL TEXT]

> A2, L1: MY EIGHTH GRADE TEACHER, SISTER CAROLYN MARIE, WAS THE MOODIEST PERSON I HAVE EVER KNOWN. ONE MINUTE SHE CAN HAVE A GRIN STRETCHING FROM EAR TO EAR . . .

Mr. Peterson circles *WAS* and *CAN* and draws a line from one to the other. In the margin he writes "tense." In addition, as we saw earlier, he underlines *STRETCHING FROM EAR TO EAR* and in the margin writes, "Another way to say this?" His comments on Lisa's text look like this:



We ask Lisa about the circled words, accompanied by the word "tense." She has no trouble recognizing the marks as referring to her switching verb tenses. It is important to keep in mind a remark Lisa made earlier to us indicating that one of the things she tries to remember when she writes is tenses, because, as she says, she "jumps all over the place." It is also important that she tells us that Mr. Peterson has more experience than his students and "probably knows what he is doing." We see that Mr. Peterson's comments about verb tense touch upon three elements for Lisa: (a) information given in class about consistency of tenses; (b) Lisa's acknowledged lack of demonstrated skill with verb tense; (c) her valuing of a thorough and (probably) knowing authority whom she aims to please. Now, Lisa's writing does not immediately benefit from Mr. Peterson's comment

about tense, for a tense shift occurs in the final draft of the anecdote, and Mr. Peterson marks it the same way as he had earlier. In her interview, Lisa says that for this second draft she "forgot" to change the verbs. Of note, though, is that while her skill with tense does not improve, she clearly does something about the verbs, as a comparison between the rough draft of the anecdote and the final draft of the anecdote reveals:

> A2, L1: MY EIGHTH GRADE TEACHER, SISTER CAROLYN MARIE, WAS THE MOODIEST PERSON I HAVE EVER KNOWN. ONE MINUTE SHE CAN HAVE A GRIN STRETCHING FROM EAR TO EAR AND THEN THE VERY NEXT THAT GRIN CAN TURN INTO A NASTY SNARL.
>
> B2, L1: MY EIGHTH GRADE TEACHER, SISTER CAROLYN MARIE, WAS THE MOODIEST PERSON I HAVE EVER BEEN ACQUAINTED WITH. ONE MINUTE SHE CAN BE GRINNING FROM EAR TO EAR, THEN THE VERY NEXT MINUTE, THAT GRIN CAN DIVERSIFY INTO A NASTY SNARL.

Lisa knows on one level that her verbs "jump all over the place." While she possesses the "right" information, she appears not to possess the skill to solve the problem. However, that she may indeed have the correct skill is indicated in the final character sketch, in which the tense problem is remedied:

> C5, L1: ONE WEIRD THING ABOUT SR. CAROLYN WAS HOW INTERCHANGEABLE HER MOODS WERE. ONE MINUTE SHE COULD BE GRINNING, THEN THE VERY NEXT MINUTE, THAT GRIN COULD FADE INTO A NASTY SNARL.

In the final draft of the anecdote (B2, above), her skills may be compromised by the value she places on doing what Mr. Peterson and other teachers want. That is, her changes of *KNOWN* to *BE ACQUAINTED WITH, HAVE A GRIN* to *CAN BE GRINNING,* and *TURN* to *DIVERSIFY,* as well as the tense change to present progressive instead of past, may, in part, also be a "direction-following" response to Mr. Peterson's question, "Another way to say this?" her remedy confounding the tense problem with the cliche problem that we discussed earlier. Unfortunately, the changes are not satisfactory, as on this draft Mr. Peterson not only edits out *FROM*

EAR TO EAR, but marks *DIVERSIFY* as wrong too. Her lexical changes, her longer and fancier words, actually seem to make things worse. However, she *is* "saying it another way" and she may also be attempting to incorporate Mr. Peterson's ideal text that would demonstrate vivid verbs. Yet in trying to do what Mr. Peterson wants, Lisa seems not to have sight of Mr. Peterson's underlying intents, which emerge in the classroom, for her to develop her own voice. Negotiating the solution to a writing problem becomes complicated by this incongruity and Lisa's own judgment appears to be lost. (See Sperling, 1985, for an account of the ways Lisa as well as other students handle comments that require narrow as opposed to broad interpretations—comments asking for changes in grammar or structure as opposed to comments asking for changes in content, for example.)

[-CLASSROOM REFERENCE] [-IDEAL TEXT]

When the written response episode reveals no apparent shared information on top of no demonstrated student skill, a student's value system incongruent with the teacher's can interfere even more dramatically with the student's internalizing the teacher's instruction. On the final character sketch, for example, Lisa writes:

> C6, L1: HAVING TO GUESS HER EVERY MOOD AND WHAT TO SAY AROUND HER FROM TIME TO TIME GOT TIRSOME AND TEDIOUS.

Mr. Peterson crosses out *HAVING* and writes in "We had." He crosses out *TIME* and writes in "another, and this," so the commented text looks like the following:

C6, P1: We had ~~HAVING~~ TO GUESS HER EVERY MOOD AND WHAT TO SAY AROUND HER FROM TIME TO ~~TIME~~ another and this GOT TIRSOME AND TEDIOUS.

His changes yield, "We had to guess her every mood and what to say around her from time to another [sic] and this got tirsome . . ." (Mr.

Peterson does not correct the spelling of "tiresome"). Also, Mr. Peterson's "this" Lisa reads as "thus." While a plausible interpretation because his handwriting is somewhat unclear, this reading renders a serious change in meaning and logic.

There is no reference in class to the ideal text that motivated Mr. Peterson's change, no reference, for example, to preferring direct human sentence subjects to long cumbersome phrases. Thus it appears that Lisa has no hook of information on which to hang her writing skills. However, she is eager to do what Mr. Peterson wants, and herein may lie her misunderstanding. When we ask Lisa what she thinks of this rewording—and to try to recall what she thought when she first saw it—Lisa is positive that Mr. Peterson has done the right thing. She tells us that Mr. Peterson's version sounds "more polished," more like a high school student writing than a middle school student, *especially,* incongruously, the *"thus."* Lisa accepts what he says, or seems to say, without question, uncritically. Because she is so willing, she fully engages with her interpretation of his rewording, sympathetic to what she erroneously perceives as Mr. Peterson's ideal text. Ironically, it is Lisa's penchant for good student behavior—paying attention to and accepting what the teacher says—that boggles the problem solving and eclipses her own judgment.

CONCLUSION

We have examined the written responses to the writing of one kind of student, a high achiever with a strong drive to be compliant. What we have found is that the written response round, that is, the interaction between responder and recipient through the medium of the written comment, invokes a complex problem-solving activity requiring strategies on the part of the student that incorporate not only information and skills that ideally match the teacher's, but, potentially, a host of values as well. These values are formed by a full social and school context that colors the very meaning of the problem solving.

While there are successful written response rounds between this teacher and student, the unsuccessful ones that emerge even under these desirable teaching conditions alert us to what may be unavoidable complexity in any teacher-student writing interaction: The

student holds values that, even if well-intended, can be enough out of line with the teacher's as to interfere with the student's and the teacher's matching their definitions of writing problems and solutions.

By looking at Lisa's attempts to use Mr. Peterson's comments to solve her writing problems, and by considering the full range of equipment—the information, skills, and values—that she brings to the process, we learn something about Lisa—about her ability to judge both her writing and Mr. Peterson's feedback; about her dependency on the teacher as external authority; about her reluctance to take on authority herself. But beyond this, by closely observing an activity that we know to be rife with misunderstanding, we learn something about the dissonance between the skills and information of teacher and student and the complications to these brought by a dissonance of values.

With the researcher's lens, then, we can alert teachers to hidden constraints on their teaching, and perhaps demystify some of the persistence that students show in misconstruing teacher response. We hope that the kind of analysis we have done will help teachers to anticipate at least some student misunderstandings, which seem to reflect the context in which writing gets learned and taught. In their sleuth work, teachers need not work alone if they can find ways to get their students to talk about their values regarding writing in general and writing in school. The trick will be to convince certain students that pleasing the teacher may not be a magic formula for improving the way they write.

APPENDIX

Mr. Peterson's Class - A Model

Principles of Ideal Text

Anticipate reader reaction
- Be interesting (exciting, dramatic, spicy, involving)
  - Use and interesting topic
  - Use specific details and descriptions
    - Contrive these, if necessary, from your imagination to liven up your writint and make it more fun to to read and write
  - Use strong verbs, chosen carefully to suggest action and to convey more
  - Get rid of excess words
    - To eliminate repetition
    - To get into your subject faster
- Be clear
  - Use specific and concrete language
  - Give specific examples
  - Give descriptions that present a clear picture
  - Make connections obvious
    - Between paragraphs (ideas)
      - Order them to create the best transitions
    - Within paragraphs
      - Write a strong topic sentence that gives direction to the paragraph and connects the sentences together
      - Give evidence to support the point made in the topic sentence
      - Relate all sentences in the paragraph to the topic sentence
    - Within sentences
      - Combine ideas when possible into one sentence that makes the links and connections between ideas, and which avoids sentences that are too long and scattered

Do the assignment
- Write a character sketch which the teacher will show you how to do
  - Figure out what the person's about

- Analyze the person
  - Know the character well
    - Consider a range of possible subjects
    - Choose one that you already have a lot of information about
  - Make observations
    - Take a close look at the person
    - Distinguish between observation and judgement
    - Defer judgement - collect lots of examples and descriptions instead
  - Interpret revealing behaviors
    - Think about what they say about the person
    - Make guesses based on your knowledge of the person
  - Discover and identify patterns in the persons's behavior
    - Identify a quality or characteristic of the person, a trait, from the specific examples and evidence you have
    - Find traits which contrast with one another
- Describe and explain the person to make her/him understandable to others
  - Use instances that demonstrate the character traits
    - Use stories that bring out the traits
    - Use anecdotes that catch the character of the person and give examples of behavior traits
    - Use specific things the person says, quotes or dialogues that reflect the personality of the character
      - Make these up or derive them from your feelings about the character, if necessary
  - Make language choices to catch reader interest and to get an idea across
    - Choose words carefully to:
      - Label or describe ideas and traits
      - Spice up your writing
      - Simplify
      - Avoid ordinary, average, or vague words
- Follow the format provided by the teacher

(contined)

APPENDIX (Continued)

- Begin with an opening sentence that engages reader interest
  - Start with a picture
  - Start with an action
  - Start with a dramatic statement
  - Start with a quote that catches the person's character or personality
- Make the first paragraph an introduction to the person
  - Deal with his or her appearance as it relates to his or her personality and makes a comment on the way he or she chooses to portray her- or himself
    - Describe clothing
    - Describe looks
    - Describe manner
    - Describe movement
- Write three paragraphs in the middle that each deal with an aspect of the person
  - Make connections between the ideas
    - Use three separate but related qualities
    - Link the traits by contrast
    - Make links between qualities and examples
- Write a conclusion

Principles of Ideal Process

- Make use of experience and imagination
  - Make it up
  - Imagine
  - Improvize
  - Stretch the truth
- Steps in design
  - Draft a paper
    - Make language choices
    - Include specific details
    - Find an effective order
  - Hand it in to the teacher
  - Rewrite, revise, re-do
    - Paying attention to teacher comments
    - Trying to do better

Hand it in again
Jots and Tittles
Appropriate length
Conventions
Of length
Of spelling and punctuation
Consistency
Of tenses
Of style
Get results
Good grades
A jump in writing ability

Independent Student Criteria

Good writing
Is writing that sounds right
Grammar
Word choices
Phrasing
Paper organization
Is whatever is rewarded by the teacher
Plain, basic, straightforward
Different from mine
Harder to produce

NOTES

1. For the 1985 study, our research team observed and recorded by means of field notes and audio- and videotapes, the daily activities in this ninth grade English classroom over a period of seven weeks. The research team recorded the teaching and learning of three complete assignment sequences during which students produced multiple drafts toward three essays. We collected extensive response data for one essay assignment for selected focal students who represented the range of academic achievement in their class. Data included all student papers with teacher responses written on them; video- and audiotaped records of all classroom activity; researchers' summary notes and comments on all activity; audiotaped interviews with the teacher; and audiotaped interviews with the students. (See Freedman, 1985, in press, for a full account of student selection and data collection and reduction.)

2. The teacher was selected after an intensive search and screening for, among other things, offering a rich range of response, of which written response was one type, and offering a writing curriculum that covered the range of analytic writing tasks that high school students encountered as they are asked to produce academic papers (see Freedman, 1985, for a full account of teacher and classroom selection). Mr. Peterson produced written response on all drafts of his student's writing. Further, he accompanied this response with individual conferences because, as he said to us, "I've learned I can not assume students understand my clear and concise prose, so I no longer take chances. When I return a set of papers with my written comments I arrange a brief conference with each student, primarily to determine if he understands what I have written on his paper" (Freedman, 1985, Appendix 6, p. 14). We focus on Lisa (a code name) because, to do an in-depth case study, reflecting on information, skills, and values surrounding written response, we need to be able to draw on as much explicit data as we can, and Lisa, a high-achieving student, interacted most extensively with Mr. Peterson in the classroom as well as with us in our interviews.

3. Note: For our purposes here, examples are presented using the following conventions: The student draft is identified (A, first draft, anecdote; B, final draft, anecdote; C, final draft, character sketch); the round, in the order we present it, is given a number (e.g., "1"); the turn is identified as either Lisa's (L) or Mr. Peterson's (P); and, finally, the turn is given a number (e.g., "1"). Thus the first round that we look at from the final character sketch is identified as "C1"; Lisa's first turn is identified as "L1"; Mr. Peterson's first turn is identified as "P1." In all cases, we are faithful to the student's and teacher's texts.

4. During the seven weeks that we observed Mr. Peterson's classroom, the student wrote several descriptions and analyses of persons, either real or fictitious. Of the three major essay topics assigned during the time of our observations, we focus here on the first, for which we collected extensive data and for which Mr. Peterson gave a substantial amount of written response.

5. For a complete quantitative analysis of these data, see Sperling and Freedman (1986).

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